



**Aurora Police Department
350 North River Street
Aurora, Illinois 60506-4154**

CHIEF WILLIAM J. LAWLER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GANG SWEEP NETS ARRESTS; DRUG AND WEAPONS CHARGES

A late night search warrant that netted guns, narcotics, cash, and an array of electronic surveillance and other equipment, capped a long term, multi-agency operation that targeted an Aurora street gang yesterday (Thursday, July 16).

"Operation Summer Vacation", which was spearheaded by Aurora Police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), netted seven arrests of members and/or associates of the gang. One additional, unnamed suspect is at large as a result of the investigation.

"This will be a summer vacation these men will never forget," said Aurora Chief of Police William Lawler.

A simultaneous "sweep" consisting of over 30 officers from various agencies that spanned areas in and around Aurora, began at about 10:00 [a.m.](#) yesterday, with the goal of serving seven men with arrest warrants.

By 4:30 [p.m.](#), six of the seven men were in custody. A search warrant executed at about 11:10 [p.m.](#) last night at a home in the 600 Block of Grand Avenue resulted in the seizure of three handguns, over 30 grams of cocaine, approximately eight and one-half pounds of cannabis, and almost \$19,000.00 in

cash. Also seized was body armor, laser sights, ammunition, police scanners, cell phones, two-way radios, scales, and other items.

The owner of the home, Serafin Castellanos, 25, was charged with unlawful possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver, unlawful possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver within 1000 feet of a school, unlawful possession of a controlled substance, unlawful possession of cannabis with intent to deliver, unlawful possession of cannabis, and unlawful possession of a firearm without an FOID card.

The seven other men are also facing an array of narcotics and weapons charges which will likewise be prosecuted under state statutes for alleged offenses that occurred in 2003 and 2004. Six of the seven men allegedly sold firearms or narcotics to confidential informants who were under the direction and control of Aurora Police Investigators and ATF Agents. Charges on the seventh man resulted from a search warrant executed at his former address. Charging documents indicate that all of the transactions were videotaped.

"This operation is an ancillary result of the investigations we've conducted with the ATF over the past two years", said Chief Lawler. "Although it is by no means our largest sweep of gang members, it certainly sends the message that we will continue to aggressively target those that partake in this type of behavior."

The men arrested yesterday and charged with weapons offenses after allegedly selling guns to confidential informants include:

Brandon S. Rodgers, 22, of the 700 Block of Inland Drive, Naperville; charged with three counts of aggravated unlawful use of a weapon for allegedly selling a handgun in 2003.

Jeffrey L. Hicks, 20, of the 1200 Block of Foran Lane, Aurora; charged with aggravated unlawful use of a weapon, unlawful use of a firearm by a felon, and unlawful use of a weapon, for allegedly selling a sawed off shotgun in 2003.

Rocky N. Escareno, 24, of the 900 Block of Front Street, Aurora; charged with aggravated unlawful use of a weapon, unlawful possession of a firearm by a felon, and unlawful sale of a firearm, for allegedly selling a 12 gauge shotgun in 2004.

In addition, Rafael Vargas, 20, of the 200 Block of North View Street, Aurora; was charged with unlawful possession of a stolen firearm stemming from an

April, 2003, search warrant at his former residence in the 900 Block of Edwards Street, Aurora. Authorities seized a semi-automatic rifle that had been reported stolen in a residential burglary in Aurora as a result of the warrant.

Those arrested yesterday and charged with narcotics offenses after allegedly selling crack cocaine to confidential informants include:

Joshua J. Hines, 21, who listed the same View Street address as Vargas. Hines was charged with unlawful delivery of a controlled substance and unlawful possession of a controlled substance for allegedly selling about 41 grams of crack cocaine in 2003.

Jamison L. Moore, 27, of the 1800 Block of Felten Road, Aurora. Moore was charged with two counts each of unlawful delivery of a controlled substance and unlawful possession of a controlled substance for allegedly selling over 30 grams of crack cocaine on two separate occasions in 2003.

Rodgers and Hicks were arrested at their homes. Escareno and Hines were taken into custody in the 1200 Block of South Fourth Street and 900 Block of Windemere Lane, respectively, the homes of acquaintances of the two men. Vargas was taken into custody during a traffic stop at New York and Ohio Streets, Aurora; and Moore was arrested in the 1700 Block of Felten Road, Aurora.

Officials will release the identity of the only man still at large, after additional investigation is completed.

"ATF, along with our partners in law enforcement, vow to reduce the proliferation of gun violence and drug trafficking, and the profit gained from such illegal activities, by pooling our manpower and resources, while calling on law abiding citizens to partner with us in this effort", said Andrew Traver, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Chicago Division. Chief Lawler further warned gang members by adding, "These types of sweeps are by no means over with."

Lawler said he was particularly pleased with the fact that numerous guns were taken off the streets as a result of the investigation. "Every time we seize a gun, we prevent a shooting", he explained.

In bond court at the Aurora Branch Court today, Castellanos' bail was set at \$250,000.00; Escareno, Moore, Hicks, and Vargas, \$50,000.00 each; Hines, \$25,000.00; and Rodgers, \$20,000.00.

Assisting in the investigation were officers from the Kane and DuPage County Sheriffs' Offices; the Naperville, Batavia, Montgomery, and Joliet Police Departments; and prosecutors from the Kane and DuPage County State's Attorneys Offices.

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